



# American Recreation Coalition

*Dedicated to the protection and enhancement of everyone's right to health and happiness through recreation.*

## SEPTEMBER 2012 NEWSLETTER

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### **ARC's Executive Committee Meets, Gives Preliminary Approval to New Strategic Plan**

ARC's Executive Committee met at the Recreation Vehicle Industry Association's headquarters in Reston, Virginia, on September 25 to review the 2013 budget and **Advancing Recreation Causes 2013-2016: A Strategic Plan for the American Recreation Coalition**. The plan covers a number of goals, including formation of councils of ARC members according to organization type and reinvigoration of the Recreation Roundtable. ARC is also developing and will assist broad-based coalitions at the state level as an extension of its work with governors and state park directors on Great Outdoors Week. To see a copy of the plan, click [here](#).

More details on the new councils will be shared soon, but plans are underway for a late 2012 gathering of associations representing recreation product dealers and retailers and providers of services directly to consumers. Recreation Vehicle Dealers Association President Phil Ingrassia will co-lead this effort.

The Executive Committee also authorized ARC staff to proceed with plans to relocate to new and modern space in Washington, D.C. at 1200 G Street, NW, on April 1, 2013, after 17 years in its current location.

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## NPS Gears Up for Centennial Campaign

National Park Service (NPS) Director Jon Jarvis recently shared with key park interests plans to launch a major awareness and promotion campaign tied to his agency's upcoming 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2016. The campaign is prompted by a decline in park visits and overnight stays and a concern that national parks are not relevant to a growing number of Americans. The Director was recently briefed on other key leisure campaigns, including Go RVing, Take Me Fishing and Discover Boating, which also seek to increase and diversify awareness and participation.

In August, NPS sought from, and received, a \$1 million commitment from the National Park Foundation (NPF) to fund the initial phases of the campaign. NPS and NPF produced a Request for Proposals which was delivered to about a dozen agencies. Most responded with offers. NPF and NPS leaders met with the eight agencies in Washington and selected two as finalists. A selection announcement is imminent. All of the firms emphasized multi-channel strategies that extend beyond attractive ads, and the role of parks as deliverers of stories is likely to be a key part of the campaign.

Director Jarvis emphasized that the campaign would be designed as inclusive – a “big umbrella” – and is seeking advice on measurable outcomes of the campaign. The Director outlined several initial goals: (1) invigorating the current base of park visitors/supporters, (2) reaching out to a more racially diverse group of Americans and (3) finding ways to be relevant to America's Millennials. The Director noted that the campaign was envisioned as having the same agency through 2016, but that the campaign was also envisioned as continuing even subsequent to the centennial. He told us that the agencies had predicted budgets of \$6 to \$12 million for the campaign through 2016 – not including media buys.

Park concessioners at the meeting with the Director urged inclusion of *visitation*, *intention to return* and *intention to recommend* park visits as top Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for the campaign.

Neil Mulholland, President of NPF, echoed the Director's interest in making the campaign inclusive and noted that the campaign would likely depend highly on local activation – with the active involvement of concessioners and others linked to specific parks and regions. NPS and NPF called upon the recreation community and state tourism agencies to share research which could help guide the campaign.

Further details on the campaign will be available at the National Park Hospitality Association's Grand Thoughts at the Grand Canyon meeting.

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## **Grand Thoughts at the Grand Canyon**

The National Park Hospitality Association invites all recreation community leaders to participate in the October 16-22 ***Grand Thoughts at the Grand Canyon*** program, a week-long exchange of ideas designed to help America's parks flourish in the 21st Century. Recent additions to the program include the Director of the National Park Service, Jon Jarvis, and National Park Foundation President Neil Mulholland.

Grand Thoughts is a continuation of "big picture" thinking about America's national parks and the American park idea which commenced in January 2012 at the first America's Summit on National Parks. Both efforts focus on 2016 – the 100th anniversary of the creation of the National Park Service. The meeting is expected to draw more than 200 park community leaders to the Grand Canyon Lodge on the North Rim. The operator of the Lodge will earmark 30% of all accommodations receipts for a new NPS Centennial Account to be held by the National Park Foundation and used for anniversary-related programs and projects.

Grand Thoughts will feature TED-like lectures and break-out sessions focused on inspiring and honing big ideas to keep parks relevant in 21st Century America. Among the topics to be covered are: the NPS's A Call to Action Strategy; National Park Guest Donation Programs; Healthy Parks Healthy People; Dark Skies; a newly announced multi-year NPS Centennial Communications Campaign; Strategies for Expanding and Sustaining Funding for National Parks and National Park Programs; and Harnessing Technology to Improve Park Visits. The North Rim will also have temporary excellent cell and internet access during the program to help participants learn more about ways modern telecommunications can be used to improve park experiences.

Participants in Grand Thoughts will include a broad representation of the businesses serving park visitors with lodging, food, transportation and retail needs. Concessioners in U.S. national parks operate under contracts with the National Park Service and employ an estimated 25,000 workers in parks, mostly in direct visitor-contact positions.

For more information on and registration forms for Grand Thoughts at the Grand Canyon, please click [here](#).

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## **Improving Recreation Opportunities in National Forests**

Much has been happening on ARC's efforts to develop a strategy which will allow the national forests to continue to provide the nation with outstanding, diverse and abundant recreation opportunities. Since our meetings in June, July and August, it has become even clearer to us that reliance on appropriated funds to update – even maintain – major recreation infrastructure in the national forests is a sure path to declining quality of experiences and closure of facilities when major systems failures – like water – occur.

The National Forest Recreation Authorities Task Force, a group headed up by Kevin Garden, a lawyer specializing in concessions and permits, and with active participation by the National Forest Recreation Association, National Ski Areas Association, ARC Board Member Margaret Bailey of CHM Government Services and others, has found that there are exciting, immediately available and feasible ways for the Forest Service to encourage additional private-sector investment and operations. In some instances, application of strategies already in use by the agency to campground and marina operations will produce big changes. In other cases, the Forest Service has limited its capabilities through policy and forest orders without public involvement – which also means that changes in these policies and orders are feasible. The task force has boiled this down to a handful of top issues (Length of Permits; Change of Permittees; Length of Stay; and Applicability of NEPA) – but there are also important areas it has identified for ongoing consideration, using such existing programs as Service First, Stewardship and FLREA authorities. Our efforts have also discovered how little information on recreation partnerships is readily accessible to Forest Service leaders.

Later this month we will suggest pilots to the agency for several categories:

- campground makeovers;
- marina makeovers;
- in-season storage opportunities at campgrounds and marinas; and
- candidates for expanded DMO and youth conservation corps operations.

Our efforts coincide with a transition in Forest Service recreation program leadership. Jim Bedwell, who has served as National Director of Recreation, Heritage and Volunteer Resources for many years, will relocate in early October to Denver, where he will assume regional recreation program responsibilities. Department officials have told us that they see this transition as an opportunity to strategically realign the Forest Service recreation program.

Stay tuned for more exciting news!!!

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### **Partners Outdoors 2013 Set for February**

Planning is well underway for Partners Outdoors 2013, which will be held February 19-21 at the National Conservation Training Center in Shepherdstown, West Virginia. This results-oriented brainstorming session for creative and visionary members of the recreation community – from both the private and public sectors – will focus on three general topics: 1) innovative funding for recreation investments and operations, including utilization of conservation corps; 2) serving international visitors to America's Great Outdoors; and 3) integrating recreation and transportation programs within the MAP-21 structure and beyond.

The Partners Outdoors Steering Committee has decided to respond to the challenge of increasing restrictions on federal travel – and the threat to robust communication within

the recreation community posed by those restrictions – by integrating video-conferencing technology into the program, making use of off-site speakers, pre-recorded presentations and multiple-site discussions. Partners Outdoors will still gather up to 100 persons in one location to facilitate very valuable face-to face discussions and networking but will also use today’s technology to bring in off-site expertise and conduct discussions among two or possibly more sites.

Participation in Partners Outdoors is by invitation only. Sponsoring organizations, including seven federal agencies, the National Association of State Park Directors and the American Recreation Coalition, will be extending invitations in the coming weeks. For more information, contact Catherine Ahern at [cahern@funoutdoors.com](mailto:cahern@funoutdoors.com).

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### **Updated Recreation.gov Receives Mixed Reviews**

Interior Secretary Ken Salazar and other key federal officials recently rolled out a “new” [www.recreation.gov](http://www.recreation.gov). The Interior Department describes the site’s redesign as the first step in a multi-year effort “to engage visitors with enhanced interactive content and more multimedia, mobile, trip-planning tools” that will allow them to make reservations, review suggested itineraries and look for specific activities to enjoy. The updated site is more attractive and has some improvements, but has also been met with some criticism, including an especially tough critique published in the [High Country News](#). The article, which describes the site as “a solid first step,” also notes that it is difficult and time-consuming to navigate and does not provide easy access to useful information.

ARC applauds the efforts of the Recreation.gov team to provide useful services to public land visitors – access not only to campground reservations, but also to information on the wide array of recreation opportunities available on public lands. But the website does need to improve even more. As part of the continuing work to improve the site, ARC has been asked to share its assessment of the new [www.recreation.gov](http://www.recreation.gov) with top federal officials. Please help by providing your thoughts to [dcrandall@funoutdoors.com](mailto:dcrandall@funoutdoors.com).

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